



Feds ignore floodgate system, officials say

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LOGAN TWP. -- Local officials say the federal government continues to dismiss a long-dilapidated floodgate system here, despite the desolation wrought by the breaching of the levee system which was intended to protect the city of New Orleans from flooding.

For decades, local officials have worried that if the 4.5 mile flood protection system -- which includes two sluice gates and a levee -- fails, thousands of families in at least six municipalities would be devastated by flooding.

"We've been hollering and pleading and begging for federal legislators for 20 or 30 years to help us with this," said state Sen. Stephen Sweeney, D-3, of West Deptford, who has estimated that the total cost of repairing the system could come to \$30 million.

The last entity charged with maintaining the system is the Repaupo Meadow Company, which has been defunct since the 1970s, leaving the responsibility of the system in dispute.

Though Greenwich Township has assumed "limited sponsorship" of the system, most local officials contend it is the Army Corps of Engineers' responsibility to see that the system is kept intact.

Bruce Rogers, a physical scientist with the Corps, said since the Corps didn't build the system, they are only responsible for inspecting the system, not maintaining it. Rogers added that along with the two townships, the system is the responsibility of Dupont and Hercules, Inc, which both sit on portions of the levee. Rogers said that Greenwich, Hercules and Dupont have all done well in maintaining their parts of the levee, but that Logan has yet to clear the vegetation along their 600 yards of the structure, preventing the Corps from declaring the levee in "acceptable" condition and partially "insuring" it should it fail.

Earlier this summer, the state approved a \$2.25 million grant to replace the sluice gate. The legislation, however, has been stalled for several months now, awaiting acting Gov. Richard Codey's signature.

At a Tuesday night council meeting, Logan Township Mayor Frank Minor introduced a petition, to go out to residents later this month in the township's newsletter, calling on Senators Jon Corzine and Frank Lautenberg, as well as Congressman Rob Andrews, to pull in federal moneys to fix the system.

"The corps is responsible for this," said Andrews. "We're not going to let them off the hook."

Andrews said he, Corzine and Lautenberg are working to push two pieces of legislation through both houses of Congress, one that would designate the Corps as being responsible for the system, and one that would appropriate \$10.6 million as a "downpayment" for fixing the system.

"It's fine that everyone's so concerned, but Greenwich has been repairing this sluice gate for the last 20 years," said Greenwich Mayor George Shivery. "At this point, everyone has a responsibility. It's time to stop the rhetoric and send us a check."

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